

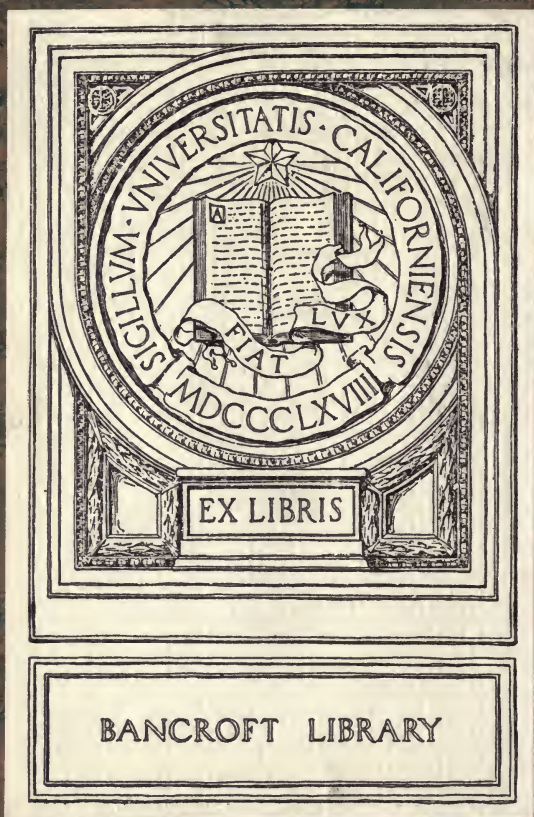
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CONFERENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF
THE ROMANCE NATIONS TO THE HISTORY
OF AMERICA

REPORTED BY

WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD

CHAIRMAN OF THE CONFERENCE

Reprinted from the Annual Report of the American Historical Association
for 1909, pages 219-227



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THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D. C.



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XIV. CONFERENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ROMANCE
NATIONS TO THE HISTORY OF AMERICA.

REPORTED BY
WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD,
Professor in Columbia University, Chairman of the Conference.

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ROMANCE NATIONS TO THE HISTORY OF AMERICA.

By WILLIAM R. SHEPHERD.

Owing to the fact that the invitations to address the conference could not be sent out in time, it was agreed that the several speakers should express informally their views on the topics communicated to their charge. With the exception of Mr. Yánes, whose admirable sketch of the relation of the Republics of Latin America to the general subject has been printed elsewhere,¹ the chief participants in the conference based their remarks on brief notes. Since the summary that follows is derived from abstracts and from press accounts of these remarks, it necessarily does scant justice to the presentation of the four themes discussed. The results that it embodies, however, encourage the hope that a conference on the history of America in the broad sense may become a permanent feature of the sessions of the American Historical Association. *Sanborn Library*

In his address of introduction the chairman said:

American history does not consist solely of the history of the United States, and the history of the United States does not consist solely of the history of the "Thirteen Colonies" and of what has proceeded from them.

Effort is rarely made to present the history of the American Continents as an orderly process of development. The moment in which the English or the Anglo-Americans arrive on the scene furnishes an excuse for ignoring the history of all areas not under their control. The share of the Romance nations in shaping the history of America is ill understood and less appreciated.

In our schools and colleges, in the textbooks and in the courses dealing with "American" history the work of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the French is regularly treated as a series of more or less detached episodes possessing a sort of picturesque interest quite unimportant in character. What they accomplished seems to be regarded as something useful to fill up a chronological void before the English established themselves—a pretext for showing that the Spanish and the French settlements in this country were allowed to exist only because an inscrutable Providence had decreed that in the fullness of time they should come under English rule and eventually form a part of the United States. The tales of Spaniards and of Frenchmen marching, fighting, and shooting, wandering in the wilds of the New World, now missionaries, now

¹ Bulletin of the International Bureau of the American Republics, February, 1910, pp. 207-213.

marauders, have diverted attention from the essential to the incidental, from the permanent to the transitory, from the instructive and the valuable to the curious and the quaint in their respective careers. Indeed, the very sound of the name lends zest to the obsession, for how could the representative of a Romance nation do anything that was not romantic, and how could a writer on such a theme, presumably, be anything but a romancer?

Just as the history of the "Thirteen Colonies," so the history of the Spanish and the French colonies in this country is that of the areas which they respectively occupied, of areas that were later to become parts of the United States. Each is equally important for its own sake. Not only is the history of each of these centers of colonization entitled to individual consideration, but their relations to one another and to the history of the United States in its general development need investigation and emphasis. The type of civilization planted in this country by the English, and the influence that it has since exerted, have been described in comparatively minute detail. On the other hand, the type of civilization likewise established here by the Spanish and the French, the influence that it has exercised, and its survivals at the present time have been comparatively ignored.

That the history of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the French in America possesses an interest and a significance of its own, entirely apart from its relation to the "Anglo-American" element, is an incontestable fact which the special nature of the present meeting of the American Historical Association affords an excellent opportunity to emphasize.

It should not be forgotten that the activities of Spain and Portugal have been perpetuated in vast areas having a population more than two-thirds that of the United States and endowed with resources of incalculable richness. No field of history is more neglected and none is more fascinating and rewarding to the student than the history of Spanish and Portuguese colonization in America, of the development of the Latin-American Republics, and of the problems that have arisen out of conditions so like and yet so unlike our own. The Dominion of Canada, furthermore, with an area larger than that of the United States and with resources to correspond, is a State founded by France, and one in which the contribution of the French to the history of America takes rank with that of their Spanish and Portuguese compeers in other fields of action.

Balance is an element too often lacking in the history of America as it is written and taught to-day. The share of the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the French in the several processes of discovery, exploration, colonization, and civilization should be studied from the several standpoints of their intrinsic interest and significance, their relation to the work of the English and of the American in the same directions, their place in the general development of the history of the New World, and the amount and accessibility of the materials upon which their respective achievements rest. Only by so doing can the balance be restored.

"The Contribution of Spain," the first topic on the program, was discussed by Prof. Rafael Altamira, of the University of Oviedo, Spain. In substance Prof. Altamira spoke as follows:

To recognize the existence of a fact, or of a series of facts, to prove such existence, to set forth the how and the why of its or of their being—these constitute the precise function of the historian. The performance of this function must precede any interpretation of the facts, whether moral, juridical, economic, or otherwise, and is independent of it as well. Accordingly we should keep historical investigation constantly apart from our opinions and

our judgments regarding the desirability or the undesirability, the good or the evil—from our point of view—of the acts done by any one man or by a group of men. Then our investigation of the truth of what was and of what is, will be free from any prejudices on the point of what ought to have been.

To acknowledge that Spain has had a mighty share in the civilization of the western European type established on the Continent of America; that she has exercised a great and fundamental influence on its history; that she has mingled her blood and united her ethnic type with those of the aborigines, creating mixed peoples and new branches of the old peninsular trunk; that she has left a deep impress on the language, the religion, the science, the art, the mind in general, of vast regions in South, Central, and North America—to acknowledge all this is merely to prove facts, things that have been and are, and that, whether good or evil, can not be changed by man to fit his preconceptions on the subject.

Only on the basis of an exact and, so far as possible, complete knowledge of the facts, such as they were and are, and from points of view foreign to history, may our judgment of the facts be formed. Without this basis every judgment must be precipitate and inconsistent. Proof thereof may be found in the corrections of the prejudices of former times regarding the history of Spanish colonization in America, which are constantly appearing and contributing to a better knowledge of the facts. Many features of the work of Spain in America are viewed to-day in a manner very distinct from that in which they were regarded in the middle of the nineteenth century; and we know better now those very same facts to which our judgments were applied.

If all this be true, regard for the scientific precision and for the sincerity incumbent upon every investigator compels us to admit that in many of its principal points we know comparatively little about the historical processes involved in the Spanish colonization of America; and if this circumstance in turn indicates a deficiency in our knowledge of the facts which ought to act as a spur to further investigation, it reveals also the weakness and the purely tentative character of many of the judgments formed about data supposed to have been historically well founded.

In general, it is safe to say that the historians of Spanish colonization in America, except perhaps those who have treated concrete points of narrow scope, have used but few sources taken often at second hand, and even then not always sure and impartial. The result is that such historians have done little more than to copy one another, and that real investigation of original sources has been neglected. Accordingly we know of Spanish action in America only on its external and superficial side. The history of institutions of law, of economic and social life, of scientific and literary activity, as it has been presented to us, is full of lacunæ, doubts, legends, and questions without answer, in spite of the meritorious essays or researches of many who have dealt with those themes. The principal causes of this state of affairs are (1) as a rule, the authors of the history of colonial Spanish America have attended only to the external political events and have not lent attention to the *Kulturgeschichte* and to the history of institutions; (2) there are millions of documents in the archives of Spain, such as those in the archives of the Indies at Seville, in Simancas, and elsewhere, which are little known and less used. It is evident, therefore, that the immediate duty of those interested in the matter is to have calendared, and if possible to have copied and published, the documents in question. For that purpose there seems to be nothing more practical than the foundation in Spain (particularly in Seville) by the Governments or the universities of the several nations concerned, or by groups of learned men interested in the colonial history of Spain in America, of historical institutes sim-

ilar to the schools established at Rome and elsewhere for the promotion of classical studies.

The practical result of all the foregoing is that we who devote ourselves to history ought to apply our energies to investigating, clarifying, and broadening its field of work—the field of facts—laboring in an objective sense, absolutely disinterested, inclined to accept and to proclaim the truth, whether or not it wound our prejudices or our preferences, or even our national sentiments. To do anything else would be to sacrifice beforehand a reality, as yet but little known, to a preconceived idea or to a passion which, however noble it might be, would only obscure the truth.

“The Contribution of Portugal” was then outlined by Dr. Hiram Bingham, of Yale University. He said:

The chief interest and significance of Portuguese history lies in the extraordinary achievement which one of the smallest countries in Europe was able to make during its golden age. It deserves attention as a striking instance of what a nation can accomplish as long as it believes in its invincibility. Acting on this belief, Portugal, within a single century, produced discoverers, explorers, and navigators of the very first rank, acquired a world-wide empire, developed the arts and sciences to an astonishing degree, and to crown all, brought into being one of the most supremely gifted poets the world has ever seen.

Her method of colonizing Brazil anticipates in a striking manner the excellent work of the English in the same direction a century later. Her colonists were industrious, frugal cultivators of the soil, and she allowed them in considerable measure the necessary liberty to take root and develop in new and strange surroundings.

A comparative study of her dependencies in Asia and America furnishes a brilliant example of the truth that possessions, won and held by force of arms, are only of fictitious advantage and transient value, while colonies, the prosperity of which rests on stout hearts and industrious hands, are of lasting benefit to the mother country—a lesson that is especially significant for Americans to-day.

Portugal contributed to the development of the New World a fine quality of personal character in the men whom she sent to Brazil. The life of the late Emperor, Dom Pedro II, is not one of the least of Portugal's contributions to American civilization. Few rulers have been more highly educated and talented, more scientific in thought and achievement, and more sincerely desirous of serving the best interests of their subjects.

The most striking difference between the history of Portuguese America and that of Spanish America is that apparent when the former achieved its independence. Instead of resolving itself into a series of republics ill-prepared for a stable existence, it wisely made use of a constitutional monarchy to bridge over the abrupt transition from an autocratic to a republican régime. Accordingly it was able to become a single great nation and to maintain a strong federation of States; furnishing in this respect another striking resemblance to the history of the English colonies.

We owe it to ourselves to spend more time in the study of Portuguese and Brazilian history, of a race that has given its language, customs, and laws to half a continent, of a country possessing an area greater than that of the United States, a population more than half as large as that of France, and a vast wealth in the raw materials upon which so many of our manufacturing industries depend. There is a splendid opportunity for historical writers in this field. The materials are abundant and easily accessible. The subject is full of charm and romantic interest, and great practical value.

Dr. Reuben Gold Thwaites, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, prefaced his treatment of "The Contribution of France" with a description in outline of the racial, political, and social contrasts between the French inhabitants of Canada and the Louisiana country and the English colonists along the Atlantic seaboard. He then proceeded substantially as follows:

The story of the rise and fall of the French power in America is one of the greatest epics in the records of mankind, and one in which the dramatic unities are revealed in all their essential truth. The historian of the United States in particular ought to give it more consideration by far than that which it has received. He who would trace the development of the very heart of this country must regard the colonial régime of France as the opening chapter of his narrative, to which the wanderings of the Spaniard a century earlier furnish a prelude.

Perhaps the greatest contribution made by New France to the history of North America was the achievements of its explorers. Before the British conquest in 1763 the French were familiar with the region of Canada from the St. Lawrence to the Saskatchewan, and with that of the United States from the Alleghenies to the Rockies.

Many of our modern towns were once the fur-trading posts of the Frenchman, and our map is studded with hundreds of French geographical names. The French, indeed, practically taught us the fur trade and their men, as well as their methods, were used by Americans down to our own time.

Apart altogether from their devoted labors in behalf of Christianity and civilization, like their fellow workers, the Spanish ecclesiastics to the southward, the French missionaries rendered valuable service in the cause of ethnology. They studied the Indian languages and characteristics with a minuteness of observation which has made their reports and treatises indispensable to the specialist in this branch of science.

The French of Quebec and the maritime provinces, the Creoles in the Mississippi Valley, the Huguenots among the settlers peopling the Atlantic coast have had a large influence on our history and are still a dominant force. Their sturdy, simple life, their frugal habits, their domestic graces and virtues, their cultivation of music and the arts that foster the innocent enjoyment of life have all had a distinct share in the molding of the national spirit and character throughout the major part of the North American Continent.

But the most grateful and pleasing of the various elements that France has contributed to the history of America is the dash of strong and lasting color, of irresistible romance imparted by those who lived under the French régime. It provides the fascinating exploits and achievements of explorers, like Champlain, Radisson, Marquette, La Salle, and Vérendrye; of fur traders and commandants like Duluth, Perrot, and Le Sueur; of state builders like Frontenac and Iberville; of soldiers like Montcalm. Above all it illumines with rare charm the humbler deeds of the Jesuit missionaries, of men who furnished some of the most brilliant examples on record of heroic and self-sacrificing devotion to an exalted purpose. The history of America, indeed, would lose much of its welcome color, of its warmth of tone and sentiment were the memories of the French to be blotted from its stirring pages.

At the outset of his address on "The Contribution of the Latin-American Republics," Mr. Francisco J. Yánes, of the International

Bureau of the American Republics, alluded humorously to the task incumbent upon him of condensing into the period of 20 minutes the history of 20 States since the attainment of their independence—a performance which at the rate of one State a minute seemed rather out of proportion to the size of some of the nations and to the achievements of others. Since the preceding speakers had indicated the extent to which the Spaniards, the Portuguese, and the French had left their imprint on the civilization of Latin-America, Mr. Yánes described in a general way what had been done with the trust that the forefathers had left and how far the Latin-Americans had succeeded in their efforts to keep pace with the progress of the world.

The Spanish-American Republics, in particular, began their independent career under many disadvantages. Among them may be mentioned the economic depression following in the wake of nearly 20 years of war; the lack of political experience due to a colonial tutelage of centuries; and the possession of a vast amount of territory without a population of corresponding size, a social organization of sufficient solidarity, or a supply of pecuniary means to develop its wonderful resources in the face of appalling topographical and climatic difficulties. These obstacles could not be overcome without provoking struggles to secure and maintain stability.

Of late years revolutions in Latin America have become rare occurrences. For them order and progress have been substituted to a gratifying degree. As European capital and European immigration, of which they stand in much need, enter the countries of Latin America the influences thus brought to bear will have the same beneficial effect upon them as such influences have had upon the national growth of the United States.

While the charge, so often made, that Latin Americans are a race of polite idlers may have some measure of truth when viewed from a purely material standpoint, it must not be forgotten that they inherited from their colonial ancestors a love of the beautiful, a vividness of imagination, a facility of expression, and a variability of temperament as well, which must ever remain essential characteristics along with all their other vices and virtues. They can sow a dollar and reap two in a manner so successful as that attending the efforts of their more commercially disposed brethren elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, they do possess an appreciation of those products of the heart and the mind which stand as evidences of culture.

To-day in all the Republics of Latin America there are institutions of learning worthy of the respect of older nations. From these institutions are coming forth men of a high order of intellectual attainment, well equipped for their several vocations. Illiteracy, also, is rapidly disappearing.

Given the adverse conditions against which they have had to struggle, the States of Latin America possess the comforts and conveniences, as well as the refinements, of civilization to an amount and degree surprising to those who share common prejudices based on misinformation. Their trade alone exceeds in value two billions of dollars a year. They are fostering education, taking heed of the unfortunate, encouraging science, literature, and the fine arts so earnestly and so thoroughly that the day is not far distant when their contribution to the development of the New World will receive its just meed of recognition.

Responding to the invitation of the chairman for expressions of opinion on the subject of the conference, Prof. Edward Luther Stevenson, of Rutgers College, emphasized the need of special study of the early cartography of America as a means of removing many of the prevailing misapprehensions in regard to the processes of colonization followed by the Romance nations. Prof. George Pierce Garrison, of the University of Texas, pointed out how greatly the history of the southwestern portion of the United States, first settled by the Spaniards, had suffered from neglect and how rich the materials awaiting the investigator are. Mr. Alberto Nin Frias, the former secretary of the legation of Uruguay, in closing, reviewed the progress of the spirit of understanding and cooperation among the 21 Republics, which is converting Pan Americanism from a pious wish into a practical program of international friendship and solidarity.



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